

# Bear Safety

## AVOIDING ENCOUNTERS

Denali National Park and Preserve is home to both black bears and grizzly bears. Black bears inhabit the forested areas of the park, while grizzly bears mainly live on the open tundra. Almost all bears seen by visitors along the Park Road are grizzlies. The bears of Denali are wild creatures, free to behave as they wish. If annoyed, these solitary animals can be very dangerous to intruders. For your own protection, and to keep Denali bears healthy and wild, please carefully read and abide by these rules.

As visitors to this wildlife sanctuary, each of us has an obligation to respect bears and their habitat. These rules are strictly enforced in Denali. Failure to observe them may result in citations and fines.

- 🐾 **BE ALERT:** Bears are active both day and night and can be anywhere. Watch for tracks and scat.
- 🐾 **DON'T SURPRISE:** Bears may perceive you as a threat if you startle them.
- 🐾 **MAKE NOISE:** Warn bears of your presence by making noise—sing, shout, talk. Be especially careful in dense brush where visibility is low, and along rivers where bears cannot hear you over the noise of the water.
- 🐾 **NEVER APPROACH:** Bears should live as free from human interference as possible. Give them space. Maintain a minimum distance of 300 yards (275 meters).

For more information on human-bear encounters, read *Backcountry Bear Basics* by Dave Smith; or pick up a detailed handout from the Backcountry Information Center. Allowing a bear to obtain human food or

garbage, even once, may cause it to seek out more human food. Eventually, if the bear becomes a threat to human safety, it will be killed. For this reason, it is against the law to feed bears in Denali, either purposely or by carelessly leaving food or garbage where bears can get it.

Please report all bear incidents and encounters to a ranger. Park rangers and biologists need this information to document bear behavior for research and management purposes.



## IF YOU ENCOUNTER A BEAR

- 🐾 **DO NOT RUN!** Running may elicit a chase response. Bears can run faster than 30 mph (50 km/hr). You cannot outrun them. If the bear is unaware of you, detour quickly and quietly away. Give the bear plenty of room, allowing it to continue its activities undisturbed.
- 🐾 **BACK AWAY SLOWLY IF THE BEAR IS AWARE OF YOU!** Speak in a low, calm voice while waving your arms slowly above your head. Bears that stand up on their hind legs are not threatening you, but merely trying to identify you.
- 🐾 **SHOULD A BEAR APPROACH OR CHARGE YOU—DO NOT RUN, DO NOT DROP YOUR PACK!**



Photo © Kennan Ward

### Campgrounds

- 🐾 All food, food containers, coolers, and dirty cooking utensils must be stored in a closed, hard-sided vehicle or in campground food-storage lockers whenever they are not in use. This includes freeze-dried and canned foods, as well as beverages and odorous items, such as soap, toothpaste, and sunscreen.
- 🐾 Keep a clean camp. Trash and garbage must be disposed of in bear-resistant food containers or trash dumpsters available at campgrounds. Scrape unwanted food from pots and plates and place in trash container.
- 🐾 Never leave food, containers, or garbage unattended even for just a few minutes.



Black bear photo ©Ed Vorisek

Bears sometimes charge, coming within ten feet of a person before stopping or veering off. Dropping a pack may encourage the bear to approach people for food. **STAND STILL** until the bear moves away, then slowly back off.

- 🐾 **IF A GRIZZLY MAKES CONTACT WITH YOU, PLAY DEAD.** Curl up into a ball with your knees tucked into your stomach and your hands laced around the back of your neck. Leave your pack on to protect your back. If the attack is prolonged, fight back vigorously.
- 🐾 **IF A BLACK BEAR MAKES CONTACT WITH YOU, FIGHT BACK.**

### Backcountry

The Backcountry Information Center issues bear-resistant food containers with your backcountry permit. These containers are lightweight, cylindrical canisters specifically designed to keep bears from obtaining food and garbage. Since the introduction of mandatory bear-resistant trash cans in 1984, there has been a 95% reduction in bears obtaining backpackers' food and an 88% decrease in property damage.

- 🐾 All food, including freeze-dried and canned foods, beverages, and odorous items, such as soap and sunscreen, must be kept in the bear-resistant food containers when not in use.
- 🐾 Cook and store food at least 300 feet downwind from your tent in an area with good visibility in all directions. Keep an eye out for approaching bears. Be prepared to put food away in a hurry.
- 🐾 Avoid cooking greasy or odorous foods. Do not sleep in the same clothes you wore while cooking.
- 🐾 Keep a clean camp. Pack out all garbage.

### Pepper Spray

The use of pepper spray as a bear deterrent is a personal choice. If you decide to carry it, be aware that wind, spray distance, rain, and product shelf life all influence its effectiveness. When traveling on buses, tell the driver you have pepper spray so it can be secured appropriately.